

CONNECTICUT

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OTHER STATES

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# Other States

## Connecticut

Excerpts from newspapers and other sources

From the files of the  
Lincoln Financial Foundation Collection

# ABE LINCOLN SPOKE IN MERIDEN

The "Great Emancipator"  
Gave Stirring Anti-Slavery  
Address in 1860

IN OLD TOWN HALL

Judge James S. Brooks Pre-  
sided--Meriden's Patriot-  
ism Was Aroused

The approaching centenary of the birth of Abraham Lincoln has awakened unusual interest in everything connected with the history of the "Great Emancipator." In Meriden as well as throughout the entire country, honor will be done his memory several public affairs having been arranged for the next few days.

At the present time the fact that the first martyred president of this great republic came to Meriden and delivered a stirring anti-slavery address in March, 1860, is of peculiar interest. Most of those who heard "Honest Abe" speak in the old town hall have passed away but there are a few who remember the meeting and the fact itself is of interest to the younger generation.

Mr. Lincoln came to Meriden direct from New York where he delivered a grand address in Cooper Union. He had only shortly before finished his great debate with Stephen A. Douglas in Illinois during his campaign for election to the United States senate from that state and everyone in the country was greatly interested in him.

It was a great thing for so small a city as Meriden to secure so distinguished a speaker. The old town hall, a cut of which is herewith printed, was filled to the doors and those who heard this great genius speak have never forgotten the impression produced by his oratory.

Judge James S. Brooks was chairman of the meeting and introduced Mr. Lincoln. Great enthusiasm prevailed when the speaker was introduced but it was nothing to that which was shown as he proceeded with his arraignment of the "greatest crime of the age" the traffic in human lives.

Sherman Coggeswell, now of New Preston, a brother-in-law of Homer A. Curtiss, was at that time the State school farmer and also instructor of music in that institution. He has written the following concerning the meeting at which President Lincoln spoke:

"After Lincoln delivered his Cooper Institute speech in New York he re-

peated it at New Haven and at Meriden. I was then employed as assistant farmer and teacher of music at the State Reform School at Meriden. When Lincoln entered the Town hall the house was crowded. Judge Brooks had been appointed chairman. I well remember what a smile was noticed over the audience when tall



ABRAHAM LINCOLN.

Abraham Lincoln was escorted in and introduced by the chairman—a man hardly five feet in height.

"When Lincoln began his speech his arms seemed to be in his way, but he soon forgot all about his arms. He had no manuscript and delivered one of the most telling speeches against slavery I ever heard. He had the faculty of using language that a child could understand. His power to demonstrate was the subject of comment in the daily papers. After he made his argument he had a story to tell to clinch it. Directly in front of the speaker stood a man in the crowded aisle, mouth wide open swallowing every word. It was noticed by the audience, and as Mr. Lincoln, as it seemed, dropped his words into the man's mouth, his laughter at the stories was taken up and repeated by the throng.

"After Lincoln's nomination a Wide Awake Glee club was formed and I had the honor of being chosen its leader. Only three of us are now living, Professor L. P. Chamberlain of East Hartford, N. B. Bull of Asylum street, and myself.

"SHERMAN COGGESWELL.  
"New Preston, February 4, 1909."

American Press Information Bureau

106 & 108 Fulton Street, New York City



# WHEN A. LINCOLN WAS IN HARTFORD

Spoke in the City Hall on March 5, 1860, and Dealt Largely With Question of Slavery.

APOLOGIZED FOR UNTIDY  
PERSONAL APPEARANCE.

Hartford Cornet Band Played and  
Lincoln Was Introduced by the  
Hon. George G. Sill.

Abraham Lincoln visited Hartford before he was nominated for the presidency. He came here on March 5, 1860, to make a speech in aid of the republican campaign. THE TIMES of March 6, 1860, said that the City Hall was well filled last night to hear a



ABRAHAM LINCOLN.

From a Photograph Taken About the Time of His Visit to Hartford in 1860.

speech from Abraham Lincoln of Illinois. The Hartford Cornet band furnished music. The City Hall of those days was on the site of the present police headquarters. As George G. Sill introduced him to the audience, Mr. Lincoln apologized for the slovenliness of his personal appearance, and for not having even changed his linen. He had just arrived from New Hampshire, and he thought to have got here much earlier. THE TIMES quotes him as follows:

**Spoke on Slavery.**

"Whether we would have it so or not, the slavery question is the question of the country. Though parties and politicians would have it settled it is still the prevailing question. Though parties, politicians and individuals have agreed and do agree that it should be settled, it is still the great absorbing and exciting question of the

country. However apparently important, has been before the country for years that has had the power so to excite the public mind as this question of slavery.

"It has been so, emphatically, for six years, and before this it had assumed considerable importance. It is really an old question; it was ripe

before the Revolution. And though it has been settled many times it would arise again and again each time higher. The reason why this embittered slavery agitation is not settled, is because none of the methods yet adopted have been based on a proper estimate of the size of this slavery question. All the great men—all the parties—have labored under this error. It is a larger question than we had supposed it. Now, one of the first things for us to do is to get a just estimate of the magnitude and importance of this question; for if we underestimate it, we shall not provide an adequate remedy."

Lincoln dwelt for a long time upon the all-absorbing importance and greatness of the anti-slavery question, he seemed to devote his whole speech to an effort to prove that a crusade against slavery must be made in some form or other. He made the assertion that "of the whole population of

the United States, one-sixth are slaves."

"Slave property in this country," he said, "has an aggregate value of two thousand millions of dollars, and the south views it as a property question—they do not like to be told that it is immoral"; but Mr. Lincoln believed it to be immoral and wrong—believed "that the principle of slavery is incompatible with the principles upon which the government is established."

**Forecasted Dissolution of Union.**

"It is this matter of slavery alone that endangers the Union—that makes a dissolution of the Union possible. Its effect on white or free labor is to produce an irrepressible conflict. Some people do not admit slavery to be wrong—they are indifferent—they say that a line is drawn across the continent and south of that line the land is always to be tilled by slave labor. And if they are to choose between the nigger and the crocodile, they choose the nigger. This state of indifference has been encouraged because a national policy of indifference cannot be sustained without such a national indifference in public opinion. I do not think that a national policy that no one cares about can last."

**Negro Not a Brute, He Said.**

He argued that the Declaration of Independence ought to apply to negroes as well as whites. He argued against the idea that the negro was a brute; and he opposed Douglas's popular sovereignty idea on the ground that there would be nothing to form public opinion in the territories. If no one cares about the matter, that if people in the state were not aroused to the importance of opposing it they would when they went into the territories care nothing about it if slavery were started there. He said:

"The republican party, if they could get possession of the government, would inaugurate a policy that shall hold slavery to be a wrong, and prevent its extension and keep it where it is now. If I see a rattlesnake in the fields or on the prairies I kill it with a stick; but if I find it in bed with my children it may not be best to strike it there, for I may strike the children, too, and rouse the snake to bite them, and thus I might do more hurt than good; but if I allow it to get into another bed with my children I am justly censurable. In such a case would anybody blame me for trying to get it out?"

**Opposed Democratic Doctrine.**

Mr. Lincoln opposed the democratic doctrine of "letting it alone"; he was dissatisfied with democrats who be-

voted not to meddle with it. He said:

"You do not go for opposing it in the free states because it is not there; nor in the slave states, because it is there; you will not have it brought into politics because it is political agitation; it must not be opposed in the pulpit, because it is not religion; nor in the tract society, because it causes disturbance. If the south choose to agitate it, or abolish it, you say, democrats, that you wish them godspeed. But how was it when Frank Blair was beaten in Missouri in 1858? Were any of you democrats sorry? I think not; I think you threw up your hats and hurrahed over his defeat and the success of the democracy."

"The constitution does not mention slavery nor slaves, but uses most indefinite language and reaches the subject in a roundabout misty way; and the same indefiniteness marks the law on slave population as a basis of representation, and also the fugitive slave law—all because these are organic laws for a free people, and the framers did not want future generations to know that there had been any slavery or slaves."

**Bushwhacking, He Said.**

"The attacks of the democrats upon Senator Seward's irrepressible conflict I call a system of bushwhacking. They won't listen to our assertions that Jefferson, Washington and others believed the same thing, but continually answer by howls about Seward. They don't deal fairly with us on this or on the John Brown matter—there, too, they keep up their bushwhacking."

They seized the John Brown development as their opportunity, saying 'now's your time—jump in—give 'em some.' The Fifth Avenoodles tried to use it to beat us in New York. It begun at the head and now has come down to the feet."

"I refer to the shoe strike. I don't know much about this matter, but a senator says the strike is a consequence of the sectional warfare, and the withdrawal of the southern trade. There is a strike in Massachusetts and New Hampshire, and I am glad a system of labor prevails here where a strike is possible."

Mr. Lincoln then argued to prove that the strike was not owing to the loss of southern orders, and he urged his hearers to vote anti-slavery, for the reason that if they did not we would in the next generation have slavery in Connecticut.

THE TIMES spoke of Mr. Lincoln as one of the ablest of the republican speakers.

The pictures, which THE TIMES prints herewith, are reproduced by the courtesy of the Patriotic Publishing company and are from the originals taken during the war by Matthew Brady, the famous photographer.



Lincoln Questionnaire  
-----Name of town Bridgeport County Fairfield State ConnecticutDate or dates when Lincoln spoke there March 10, 1860Has a marker or monument ever been erected to commemorate his address? Yes.If so, when was it dedicated? May 30, 1911Is any literature referring to it, or a photograph of it available?  
\_\_\_\_\_Any further information such as donor, inscription on tablet, or other data of  
interest would be appreciated.We should appreciate receiving  
"Lincoln Lore".  
Bridgeport Public Library,  
Bridgeport, Conn.







BRIDGEPORT  
PUBLIC LIBRARY AND READING ROOM  
*Burroughs Library Building*  
BRIDGEPORT, CONN.

August 13, 1931.

Lincoln National Life Insurance Company  
Fort Wayne, Indiana.

Dear Sirs:

We add this information concerning the Lincoln Memorial  
Tablet in Bridgeport:

From: Municipal register of the city of Bridgeport,  
for 1911; p.538:

"At the easterly side of the State street entrance to  
the City Hall is placed the tablet erected, by order of  
the Common Council, commemorating the visit of Abraham  
Lincoln to Bridgeport, on March 10th, 1860. In Old  
Washington Hall, then a part of the building now desig-  
nated as the City Hall, Mr.Lincoln delivered an address.

This Memorial Tablet was suggested and planned by  
Architect Joseph W.Northrop; the figure was modeled by  
Artist Paul W.Morris, and the Tablet cast by John  
Williams Bronze Foundry, New York.

The tablet was unveiled immediately preceding the  
Memorial Day parade, on Tuesday afternoon, May 30th,  
1911, commencing at 1:25 o'clock..."

On p.537 is a reproduction of the tablet below which is the  
statement "Copyright 1911, by John Williams, Inc., Bronze  
Foundry, New York. Paul W.Morris, Sculptor".

Beneath the bas-relief of Lincoln on the tablet is the  
inscription:

"Abraham Lincoln visited the city Saturday evening  
March 10, 1860, and delivered a political address  
before a large audience of citizens in Washington  
Hall, which was then a portion of this building.

This tablet is placed here in commemoration of  
that event by the city of Bridgeport.

MCMXI

"

ORLANDO C. DAVIS  
LIBRARIAN

BRIDGEPORT  
PUBLIC LIBRARY AND READING ROOM  
*Burroughs Library Building*  
BRIDGEPORT, CONN.

We have records of the following newspaper articles referring to Lincoln's visit to Bridgeport and to the tablet commemorating that event in 1860:

Bridgeport Post,	Feb.5,	1928,	p.12
"	"	Feb.14,	1928
"	"	Feb.19,	1928, p.15
"	"	Feb.10,	1929, p.18
"	"	Feb.13,	1929

The article in the Bridgeport Post, Feb.19, 1928, speaks of another visit made by Abraham Lincoln to Bridgeport in 1864, but does not give the exact date. This second visit is also mentioned in the Feb.14, 1928 entry, but here again, the precise date is not given.

Yours very truly,

*Sarah H. Griffiths*  
*per H.E.*

Head of Reference Department.

## LINCOLN CARRIED HARTFORD BY 1,307

Campaign of 1860 Bitterly  
Fought in City.

BY BILLIE S. GARVIE.

The presidential election in November, 1860, that placed Abraham Lincoln in the White House, was preceded by a bitter campaign in the local papers.

Rallies were held in the American, City and Union halls. Prominent politicians spoke. The republicans built a camp for meetings at Main and High streets. The democrats met in National hall, Trumbull and Pearl streets.

The Wide Awakes, the first uniformed marching club, was organized here and marched in many republican, local and state parades. On November 6 a big Lincoln victory torchlight parade was held here. The Providence Wide Awakes with the American band marched.

A salute of 100 guns was fired on the park during the parade. Bands massed in State House square played Hail Columbia after the parade. Fireworks closed the celebration.

Won in City and State.

Lincoln carried Connecticut with 41,613 votes, Breckinbridge 14,509. Hartford gave Lincoln 2,312, Breckinbridge, 905 votes. Hartford county gave Lincoln 8,519, Breckinbridge 3,262 votes.

Exact from clipping March 4, 1861.

The inauguration of Abraham Lincoln was hailed in this city yesterday by a salute of 24 guns on the park. A prayer meeting for the union was held at Center church.

Lincoln in Hartford.

Abraham Lincoln, former representative from Illinois, addressed a large crowd in old City hall on Market street (police building on site to-day), at a republican rally in evening of March 5, 1860.

It was during the state election campaign. George S. Sill introduced Mr. Lincoln, who spoke on "The Question of Slavery". He was the guest of Mayor Allyn during his stay.

Civil War Election.

Owing to Civil war days the local campaign of 1864 had few parades and rallies. The republicans had a monster torchlight parade November 3, with rally on the park.



ROBERT B. DAVIS  
TOILSOME HILL LANE  
BRIDGEPORT, - CONN.

March 25, 1935.

Dr. Louis A. Warren, Editor,  
Lincoln National Life Foundation,  
Fort Wayne, Ind.

Dear Dr. Warren:

In your Lincoln Lore No. 309 you give Lincoln's 1860 New England itinerary. In connection with his visit to Bridgeport, I have searched the newspaper files for an accurate account of the activities during his stay here. The "Bridgeport Farmer" (long since deceased), a Democratic organ, carried the only available mention of Lincoln's visit, in the form of an editorial, which I read with surprise and chagrin:

"We were glad to see a large number of Democrats present, because they were able to see the weak and tottering arguments of their opponents greatest apostle.

The whole speech was sophisticated in its arguments, false in its assertions, and not a single proposition tenable.

We have heard their biggest gun let off, but I think the party that fired it will suffer from its record."

This is an excellent sample of journalistic ethics seventy-five years ago.

Yours very truly,

RBD.D





not colored to work under all circumstances and we did not find many who colored to label whether it was fair or not. I like the system which has a man put in a row where you wish a right price will increase. It is a good one.

March 28, 1935

Wang Gu-Liang

My dear Mr. Davis:

Thank you also for your book plate which is very interesting and which we will be glad to place in our collection of book plates.

Very truly yours,

LAW: LH

Director

LAW:LN  
 Director  
 The following is a list of the names of the persons who have been appointed to the various positions in the Department of the Interior, under the authority of the President, and who have been sworn in as such.



# Abraham Lincoln's Speech In Meriden In 1860 Made Even The Democrats Cheer

1948

It was foggy and rainy in Meriden on the night of Wednesday, March 7, 1860. The streets were deep in mud, and there was a chill in the air. But the discomforts of the evening were forgotten when Abraham Lincoln, the Illinois lawyer who was making his bid for the presidency, got off the train and paraded by torchlight with several thousand followers to the town hall where he gave an address which echoed the sentiments he had uttered so forcefully in New Haven the night before.

A reenactment of Lincoln's historic visit to Meriden is planned, probably for Memorial Day, May 30, in conjunction with the installation of a plaque on the present City Hall in commemoration of Lincoln's speech here 88 years ago.

## Democrats Organize

The night before Lincoln came to Meriden, local Democrats under the leadership of Charles P. Colt organized the "West Meriden National Democratic Club," which aimed at promoting the interests of Stephen Douglas for president. But Lincoln's address was so convincing and his manner so forthright, that despite the early heckling of the Democrats, he won the allegiance of almost all who heard him here.

Lincoln came to Meriden from New Haven where he had made a strong bid for the labor vote of the nation by his endorsement of labor's right to strike.

"I am glad to see," he said in New Haven, "that a system of labor prevails in New England under which laborers can strike when they want to, where they are

(Continued from First Page)

cursionists were received with the wildest enthusiasm. The Republican Club of that wide-awake town had turned out in full force, and a splendid torch light procession received and escorted the party to the Hall, while about the village in every direction the buildings were beautifully illuminated. It was a triumphant march — such as could happen in few places in Connecticut. The whole town was on the streets, and on reaching the Town Hall it was speedily filled in every part by the vast throng."

The "vast throng" amounted to almost 3,000 persons, and though the Meriden town hall was reputedly the largest auditorium in the state, it could hardly contain them. The hall, reported the New Haven Journal and Courier, was "literally packed with freemen anxious to listen to the great western orator." As Lincoln mounted the platform following his introduction by James S. Brooks, the chairman, "he was loudly cheered and hearti-

ly welcomed by the Republicans of Meriden."

## Hundreds In Aisles

The speech, which followed the same line of argument as Lincoln had enunciated in New Haven, was, according to the Palladium, a "magnificent" statement of the anti-slavery position of the Republicans. "The vast audience was held in close attention even to the close — about half past ten. For more than two hours, hundreds stood closely wedged together in the aisles and about the platform, only eager to hear more from so eloquent a speaker.

"A large number of Democrats were present, some of whom showed a desire to disturb the meeting at first, but Mr. Lincoln listened and replied to all questions or interruptions, and soon interested everybody so that they forgot everything but his argument. It is generally conceded that the Meriden hall was never so full, and that no meeting ever held there surpassed this in interest and close attention to the speaker."

not obliged to work under all circumstances, and are not tied down and obliged to labor whether you pay them or not. I like the system which lets a man quit when he wants to, and wish it might prevail everywhere. One of the reasons why I am opposed to slavery is just here."

## Views On Labor

Mindful that all of his support would not come from labor, Lincoln went on, "What is the true condition of the laborer? I take it that it is best for all to leave each man free to acquire property as fast as he can. Some will get wealthy. I don't believe in a law to prevent a man from getting rich; it would do more harm than good."

The special train which the New Haven railroad had provided for Lincoln's trip to Meriden left New Haven at 7:30 in the evening, packed with jubilant Elm City Republicans, a military band and a supply of fireworks. In North Haven the train stopped and 100 more enthusiasts climbed aboard. At Quinnipiac and Wallingford crowds were gathered around huge bonfires, and 150 people made their way into the already cramped cars. Finally at Yalesville 50 more persons completed the delegation. By now the excursionists were packed into every conceivable space, but spirits were high and the few miles' ride to Meriden passed quickly.

## Crowd At Station

When the train arrived at the Meriden station, a correspondent for the New Haven Palladium reported, "a great throng was found collected, and the ex-

(Continued on Tenth Page)

## Came To Heckle

The Democrats who had come to heckle "went away admitting that it was a most remarkable meeting, and that Lincoln was a most remarkable man. His clear statement, irresistible logic, perfectly candid, courteous and honest manner, carried conviction of the truth of Republican principles to many, we believe, while his side-splitting humor well entertained even those who most bitterly hated his doctrines.

"As he closed, tremendous cheers were given for him, and then for Buckingham (William A. Buckingham, Republican candidate for governor) and the State ticket, the Republican cause, and the delegation from New Haven. The torch light procession formed again and escorted Mr. Lincoln back to the (railroad) cars.

"On the whole," commented the Journal Courier, "the Meriden meeting was one of the best of the campaign, and gave abundant assurance that the people are aroused to a full sense of duty in

the coming contest, and determined to show the slaveocracy of the State that they are not to be cheated and misled by the threats and falsehoods of the Administration press."

#### Democrats Organize

The circulation of the Administrative press, incidentally, was one of the aims of the "West Meriden National Democratic Club," whose organization on the eve of Lincoln's visit to Meriden came to naught in the face of Lincoln's popularity.

"A room is soon to be opened in the Post Office building for the Club, where all the Democratic papers can be found, and to which Democrats are respectfully invited free of expense," the new organization announced.

At least three dozen officers were elected to the Democratic club at its original meeting. Charles P. Colt was elected president; Samuel B. Morgan was named corresponding secretary and treasurer. The ten vice presidents were Joel H. Guy, Ambrose E. Doolittle, Jabez Smith, Asa Burr, Joseph U. Houston, Amos Andrews, Morris Steph-  
thews and William Haggerty.

After Lincoln's visit to Meriden, ens, James C. Black, Wyllis Mat-

the Palladium described his appearance as "a glorious success. The old spirit of 1856 is thoroughly aroused; the people of the state are awakening to the vast importance of this contest, and already we can confidently predict the result."

#### Connecticut For Lincoln

Two and a half months at Chicago the Connecticut delegation threw its votes to Lincoln, a man whose name had not even been mentioned among the list of 21 Republican presidential possibilities cited in a book published late in 1859. William H. Seward, Salmon P. Chase, Edward Bates, John Fremont, Republican nominee in 1856; Benjamin Wade and Supreme Court Justice John McLean were all considered to be candidates, but the Chicago convention gave the nomination to Lincoln.

Eight months after he appeared in Meriden, Abraham Lincoln was elected President. The town of Meriden and the State of Connecticut went Republican and the popular votes cast here helped to secure for Lincoln the majority of 180 electoral college votes which swept him into the highest office in the land.







# Lincoln Lore

September, 1974

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Number 1639

## John Niven on Gideon Welles A Review

Politics makes strange bedfellows, and there are none stranger than President Abraham Lincoln and his Secretary of the Navy, Gideon Welles. Welles was not only a Democrat before he became a Republican, but more or less a Democrat of the Loco-Foco variety; "Locofoco" was Lincoln's Whiggish term of opprobrium for his Democratic opponents. An ardent expansionist, Welles urged Martin Van Buren to embrace the cause of Texas annexation in 1844; Lincoln made an early mark in national politics when, as a Congressman, he opposed the war with Mexico for Texas. George D. Prentice, whose editorials Lincoln admired, had been Welles's arch rival in Connecticut's political newspaper wars. Nevertheless, in 1861, the two men began a cooperative effort to win the war against the South and keep the Republican party in power.

John Niven's new biography, *Gideon Welles: Lincoln's Secretary of the Navy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), will be described as the "definitive" work on the famous white-bearded Civil War diarist. Over 650-pages long, prodigiously researched, and smoothly written, the book deserves that description in many ways. Still, such a description does not quite capture the essence of Professor Niven's work. Despite the importance of Welles's position in President Lincoln's administration and the frequent use made of his diaries by many writers on the Civil War era, Welles has been a man more often referred to than studied, analyzed, and understood. His writings have been like a sign-post pointing the way to understanding the Lincoln administration; few have stopped to study the make-up of the sign itself. Therefore, one gets less the feeling of satisfaction associated with learning the definitive word than



From the Lincoln National Life Foundation

**FIGURE 1.** Gideon Welles was born in Glastenbury, Connecticut in 1802. He attended the Episcopal Academy in Cheshire, Connecticut and Alden Partridge's military school in Norwich, Vermont. His father wanted him to become a lawyer, but Welles became a newspaper man, editing the *Hartford Times*. He served four terms in the Connecticut state legislature where he wrote America's first general incorporation law by which businessmen gained limited liability according to general rules established by law rather than through a special grant of monopoly privileges from the legislature. While serving as chief of the Navy's Bureau of Provisions and Clothing under Democrat James K. Polk, Welles gained valuable experience in administering naval affairs and also established valuable connections with Maine's Hannibal Hamlin. As Lincoln's vice-president, Hamlin was later entrusted with the choice of naval secretary for Lincoln's cabinet. Welles was a capable Secretary of the Navy, reading a staggering amount of the in-coming correspondence (perhaps one-third) and drafting replies in his own hand.

the feelings of surprise and curiosity stimulated by finding an important but previously hidden historical personality. Niven's book makes one want to get out materials on and by Welles and to study them rather than to shelve the Welles materials and say, "We know exactly where he fits in now."

In Francis B. Carpenter's popular ideological painting of President Lincoln and his cabinet, the Secretary of the Navy occupies the true center of the painting (but not the focus of the painting, which is on Lincoln, of course [see *Lincoln Lore* Number 1623]). Carpenter rendered Welles's position in Lincoln's cabinet accurately, but Welles has suffered neglect while more colorful personalities to the left and right of him like Edwin Stanton and Montgomery Blair have been repeatedly etched in strong passages in many books and articles about Abraham Lincoln. Niven does not imply that Welles occupied the position of central importance in Lincoln's administrative family; on the contrary, he quite clearly shows that Welles was "not a member of the inner circle" of Lincoln's cabinet. Niven does show, however, that Welles was much less conservative and predictable and much closer to Lincoln's positions on many issues than historians previously thought.

Far from colorless, Welles had a radical streak in him. Niven argues that he "inherited" it from his father, a Jeffersonian Republican and religious skeptic from the high Federalist and staunchly Calvinist state of Connecticut. Welles became an early follower of Andrew Jackson and the father of the Democratic party in Connecticut. Uncharacteristically for a political organizer, Welles had some strong political opinions and definitely leaned towards the radical or Loco-Foco wing





From the Lincoln National Life Foundation

**FIGURE 2.** John P. Hale was Gideon Welles's "nemesis," according to Professor Niven. New Hampshire's Senator Hale served as Chairman of the Senate Committee on Naval Affairs, and he and the Secretary of the Navy feuded constantly over the awarding of naval contracts and Welles's unfortunate penchant for nepotism in the administration of naval affairs. Hale eventually supported Salmon P. Chase's bid for the Republican presidential nomination in 1864.

of the Democratic party.

Niven's book is more truly a biography than the subtitle suggests, for he spends a great deal of time on Welles's early career before he became Lincoln's Secretary of the Navy. He suffers, therefore, from the problems many biographers have: the man's life that they are studying generally spans a great period of time and therefore requires writing about eras of history that are not necessarily the writer's particular specialty. This makes the biographer rely less upon his own synthetic judgments than upon the most acceptable historical interpretations of others for the periods beyond his major area of interest. Professor Niven's first book was about Connecticut during the Civil War; his judgments about Welles's role in the era Niven knows most about seem independent and do not follow closely or slavishly any particular school of thought about the Civil War. When Niven writes about Welles as the early organizer of the Democracy in Connecticut, however, he follows rather closely the interpretation of party formation in this era laid down by Richard P. McCormick's book, *The Second American Party System: Party Formation in the Jacksonian Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1966).

It is McCormick's contention that party formation during the Jacksonian era had little or nothing to do with economic interests or local issues, and the Democratic and Whig parties were not continuations of the Federalist and Jeffersonian Republican parties. Parties arose to battle for the presidency when there was no candidate with which the particular section of the country could identify as a sectional choice. In Connecticut, therefore, no Jackson partisans appeared until "they saw some prospect that Adams might lose the presidency." The Jacksonians did not contest local elections in Connecticut until they were sustained by the outside help of federal patronage available because of Jackson's victory in 1828. The two parties became much more evenly matched in 1832, when the Jacksonians made a much stronger showing. Henry Clay simply did not have the sectional identification in Connecticut that New England's own John Quincy Adams had had; therefore Jackson's men could make great gains. To perceive party formation in this way, of course, is to see politics as pure opportunism: parties formed when ambitious

local organizers had a chance to win and therefore chanced their fortunes on one national personality or another.

Thus McCormick (and his case is important, for his book has influenced many others besides John Niven) argues that the Democratic and Whig parties "of the 1840's were 'artificial,' in that they seemingly existed in defiance of the real sectional antagonisms that were present at the time." He sees them as artificial, too, in the sense that their appeal to the voters had nothing to do with issues that affected the voters in any way. This is McCormick's description of American antebellum politics before the 1850's:

The second American party system also brought into vogue a new campaign style. Its ingredients can scarcely be described with precision, but they included an emphasis on dramatic spectacles — such as the mass rally, the procession, and the employment of banners, emblems, songs, and theatrical devices — and on club-like associations, colorful personalities, and emotionally charged appeals to party loyalty. Politics in this era took on a dramatic function. It enabled voters throughout the nation to experience the thrill of participating in what amounted to a great democratic festival that seemed to perceptive foreign observers to be remarkably akin to the religious festivals of Catholic Europe.

In their exciting election campaigns, the Americans of that generation found a satisfying form of cultural expression. Perhaps because there were so few emotional outlets available to them of equal effectiveness, they gave themselves up enthusiastically to the vast drama of the election contest. They eagerly assumed the identity of partisans, perhaps for much the same reason that their descendants were to become Dodger fans, Shriners, or rock-and-roll addicts. In this guise, at least, campaigns had little to do with government or public policy, or even with the choice of officials. For the party leaders, of course, the purpose of the campaign was to stimulate the faithful and, if possible, convert the wayward in order to produce victory at the polls.

Professor Niven adds an element to McCormick's picture of the origins of the second American party system. He suggests that Welles and other early party organizers copied the "dramatic" techniques that McCormick described in the above passage from the great religious revivals that swept America in the 1820's and 1830's. This was opportunism indeed on Welles's part, for that cool occasional Episcopalian and Jeffersonian skeptic certainly had no truck with the pietistic fervor and enthusiasm of the Second Great Awakening. Even with this addition to McCormick's scheme, Niven's overall characterization of Welles's role in organizing the Democracy in Connecticut is recognizable as nearly pure McCormick:

Writing . . . when revivalist techniques had been rather completely borrowed and secularized in politics, Michel Chevalier [a foreign observer of the American scene] was astonished at the ritualistic tone of party contests. His vivid descriptions of Democratic parades clearly establish their evangelical character. He was struck by their resemblance to religious processions he had seen in Mexico and in Europe — the torches, the mottoes, the transparencies, "the halting places" — all the symbolic trappings and varieties of quasi-mystical experience. Tocqueville, who visited the United States three years earlier, had generalized in a similar vein: "Every religious doctrine," he wrote in one of his pocket notebooks, [ " ] has a political doctrine which by affinity is attached to it." Gideon Welles would have cheerfully applied such a notion to New England Federalism, while rejecting its application to Jacksonian Democracy. Yet he did not scruple to employ both the form and substance of the second Great Awakening in his political and editorial work. He owed more to the itinerant evangelists than he knew, or would have cared to admit.

To borrow McCormick's thesis, however, causes special problems for a biographer who is sympathetic towards his subject: how does one make Welles look good when he is the opportunistic manipulator of an "artificial" system of essentially cosmetic politics? It is fair to say that Niven is sympathetic towards Gideon Welles, although he is not uncritical. Niven rather skillfully shows both sides of Welles's struggle with Samuel F. DuPont over the effectiveness of monitors and later, for example, he is downright censorious of Welles's conservative defense of Andrew Johnson's do-nothing Reconstruction policies after the Civil War. Earlier in the book, however, Niven is wont to argue that Welles was a pro-



fessional politician, yes, but one who cared more sincerely about the issues than his average peers. McCormick's thesis, then, is at odds with the biographer's natural defensiveness about his subject.

Certainly Welles was an adept practitioner of the political arts, and Niven is not afraid to admit it. Allegedly a principled Jacksonian opponent of banks, Welles signed the "memorial praying for the incorporation of the Farmers and Mechanics Bank of Hartford," which would be a "pet" bank to receive from the Democratic administration in Washington some of the federal government's funds as deposits. When members of an opposing faction of Welles's party managed to gain a nomination to run for Congress for one of their members, Welles supported him in his newspaper but published anonymous letters attacking the candidate in his paper too (page 114). Though he had himself been sympathetic with the workingmen's movement in the Democratic party, he attacked some factional enemies as atheistic radicals for having once supported the same movement. (pages 140-141). By 1846, Welles was beginning to have serious ideological differences with the Democratic administration of James K. Polk, which he thought had sold out the Northern Democracy for the slave power's interest in Texas and low tariffs. Yet Welles had urged Van Buren to climb aboard the Texas bandwagon to gain the Democratic nomination in 1844, and he held on to his patronage job in the Navy Department's Bureau of Provisions and Clothing even while he tried to undermine the administration that appointed him (pages 224-225). Clearly, Welles's dismay with the Democratic party was less a matter of sincere concern about the slavery or even the slavery-expansion issue than it was a matter of fear and anger that Northerners were being pushed out of the jobs wielded by the Democratic party when it ruled Washington. Welles also supported Isaac Toucey, his long-term factional enemy in the Connecticut Democracy, in his bid for appointment as Attorney General in Polk's cabinet, not because Toucey was a qualified applicant, but because Welles wanted to get him out of the state (page 235).

Nevertheless, Niven calls Welles a "democratic idealist," and he has some persuasive evidence. After all, the effect of office-holding on some politicians is to make them mindless defenders of the administration that employs them. Welles's course of action towards the Polk administration may have been "devious," a word Niven uses to describe it, but he probably would also have been accused of deviousness had he defended an administration he did not really believe in. In many ways, Welles was truly and idealistically democratic. When the anti-masonic fervor struck Connecticut, for example, Welles, himself a Mason, suggested that the Masons ought to dissolve their order out of respect for public opinion.

The problem here is serious, and it is a general one for the historical discipline. If every biographer followed Niven's course, adopting the latest interpretation of the period but noting the exception represented by his own subject's life, then the historian would be faced with interpretations that described movements as a whole but failed to describe accurately the course of any single man. Professor Niven might have demonstrated a bit more independence in his judgments about this phase of Welles's life.

Niven could have done so, had he been more willing to describe and analyze Gideon Welles's political ideas. If there is any consistent failing in Niven's otherwise artful and solid book, it is his reluctance to give the reader much intellectual biography. One learns a great deal about what Welles thought of men, but what he thought of measures often remains infuriatingly vague. There is very little, for example, about Welles's reading, and very probably he did not read very much. However, one does learn to one's astonishment that in a cabinet meeting to discuss Andrew Johnson and the Tenure of Office Act, Welles was the only member who knew that Daniel Webster had given a speech on removals from office. There is doubtless plenty of material for at least a skinny little chapter on Welles's ideology, if not his reading, for he was a newspaper editor and wrote hundreds of editorials. Yet nowhere in the book is there much effort to stitch together the ideas that lie in Welles's writings. The result is that one hears from Professor Niven that Welles was a more principled idealist than many wire-pullers, but one has trouble putting one's finger on the principles and ideals.

It is not the case that Professor Niven is incapable of such an analysis, for on occasion he makes very acute analyses of speeches and ideas. Take, for example, William Seward's 1858

"irrepressible conflict" speech. The common wisdom on this speech is that the phrase "irrepressible conflict" was catchy and led to the easy stereotype that Seward was too radical on the slavery question. Seward's biographer, Glyndon Van Deusen, urges this point and otherwise describes the speech as an attack on the Democratic party for having "become a sectional and local party" (Van Deusen's words). Niven agrees with Van Deusen but adds a perceptive point quite at odds with Van Deusen's characterization but fully as explanatory of the speech's tendency to hurt Seward's chance for the Republican nomination in 1860:

Beyond the words themselves, the tenor of the Rochester speech shook the precarious unity of the Republican party. Seward spoke as a Whig, not as a Republican, and he recklessly and falsely charged that Democrats had always been proslavery. Thomas Jefferson, Andrew Jackson, and James K. Polk had all been all [sic] slaveholders; Martin Van Buren had appeased the slave power in his first inaugural. Slavery, Seward implied, had been a source of political division between the Whigs and the Democrats, with the Democrats always upholding the institution.

Thus the problem with Seward was his Whiggishness rather than his radicalism on the slavery question. He did not say that the Democratic party had *become* a tool of slavery but that it *always had been*.

Niven holds that, just as Welles became a Democrat of



Painted according to Act of Congress, the year 1862, by E. A. Andrews, the artist of the first portrait of a U.S. Navy admiral.

From the Lincoln National Life Foundation

**FIGURE 3.** David G. Farragut was a Southerner chosen largely by virtue of his seniority to head the naval expedition to capture New Orleans. Farragut was nearsighted but did not wear glasses, was sixty years old, and had been passed over for other commands before. Yet in 1863, Lincoln told Welles that "there had not been, take it all in all, so good an appointment in either branch of the service as Farragut."



somewhat radical or Loco-Foco leanings, when he changed parties he became the leader of Connecticut's "more radical" Republicans. This may be true, but it is clear from Niven's book (and he does not attempt to cloak it) that Welles was basically a free soiler who feared Southern power in Washington and the "Africanization" of the territories. Along with this went a strong civil-libertarian strain of outrage at the Fugitive Slave Law. The meaning of radicalism in this context is somewhat unclear, and it would have been more instructive had Niven gone into the varieties of Connecticut Republicanism. A group of conservative heirs of the Connecticut Federalism that Welles despised in fact showed a more "radical" interest in the welfare of the black man. Theodore Dwight Woolsey, the President of Yale, and Leonard Bacon, a New Haven Congregational minister, for example, tended to be very conservative on many political questions like universal suffrage but showed a sincere life-long interest in the black man. As early as 1825, Woolsey and Bacon, according to George A. King's *Theodore Dwight Woolsey: His Political and Social Ideas* (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1956), established an Antislavery Association to improve the condition of New Haven's free Negro population and to stir interest among Connecticut's whites and religious seminarians throughout the country. In 1881, Woolsey was in his eighties and serving as a trustee of the Slater Fund, a charitable organization aimed at educating the South's blacks. Welles, by contrast, had opposed Prudence Crandall's attempt to establish a school for out-of-state black girls in Canterbury, Connecticut in 1831 and was rigidly insensitive even to the needs of blacks for protection from bodily harm in New Orleans and Memphis thirty-five years later.

Nevertheless, it is true (and not a little surprising to those who might think that Welles was always as conservative as he was during Reconstruction) that the biggest stumbling block to Welles's selection as Lincoln's Secretary of the Navy was his known radicalism on the Fugitive Slave Law. Lincoln extracted a promise from Welles to obey that law as a condition of membership in the cabinet. Then (this too is a little surprising but better known) Welles did not really live up to his promise. Long before the Army did it, the Navy, on Welles's explicit instructions, sheltered fugitive slaves who sought protection on naval vessels, employed them for wages on shipboard and in the yard, and signed them on at ten dollars a month as the equivalent of army privates for naval service. When Lincoln protested such practices by the Army, he let Welles's flagrant actions go without a reprimand, probably as a signal of his true intentions in regard to slavery as soon as he was assured of the loyalty of the border states.

Niven is on very sure ground when he talks of Welles's years on Lincoln's cabinet and the insights here are fascinating and Niven's judgments independent. The administrative and political workings of the Lincoln administration from its early confused fumbling with secession to its surer prosecution of

the war are described in some considerable detail and with freshness.

In regard to the Emancipation Proclamation, for example, Niven argues that the President asked William Seward and Gideon Welles about the possibility first because he knew where the others in his cabinet would stand. Seward and Welles thus occupied the critical center of the spectrum of political opinion in the cabinet (proof again that painter Francis Carpenter was right). When Lincoln showed his draft of the proclamation to the full cabinet on July 22, 1862, it startled *every member*. "The measure goes beyond anything I have recommended," said Edwin Stanton. Lincoln was supported only by Bates, usually considered as the most conservative member of the cabinet. Seward, interestingly enough, opposed it on the grounds that its issuance would bring foreign intervention to prevent abolition for the sake of their cotton supplies.

Niven's little description of this oft-described event challenges many commonly accepted beliefs about the Emancipation Proclamation. It makes highly suspect assertions that the Proclamation had the moral grandeur of a bill of lading and that Congress had already done nearly as much in its Confiscation Acts. It also calls into question the old saw that Lincoln was anxious to get the Proclamation out in order to dissuade England from intervention. Seward knew, what some cynical diplomatic historians since have known, that the classes who controlled British government decisions did not care a fig about America's being inconsistent about freedom and democracy.

Hopefully, these few incidents give something of the flavor of Niven's rich book. It deserves its place on the shelf next to Benjamin Thomas and Harold Hyman's distinguished biography of Edwin Stanton. Unfortunately, Professor Niven has been poorly served by his publishers, the prestigious Oxford University Press. The footnotes are at the back of the book, some 580 pages away from the reader who starts on page one. The index is downright puny; it is mostly only an index to proper names, and many of these (Prudence Crandall, for example) do not make the index. The book is also marred by an astonishing number of typographical errors. "Camaraderie" becomes "camaderie." John P. Usher becomes John B. Usher. What should be a comma on page 532 is a period. Fitz-John Porter becomes Fritz-John Porter. They coin the word "inciteful" on page 394. Mr. Stimers becomes Mr. Stimer in the very next line. Parentheses and quotation marks sometimes fail to open. On page 186, the word "arrangements" stands where one strongly suspects that Professor Niven wrote "arguments" in the original.

Fortunately, Professor Niven's meaning shines through the unappetizing format of the book, and students of the Civil War, Abraham Lincoln, and Connecticut politics are much the richer for it.



From the Lincoln National Life Foundation

**FIGURE 4.** The United States Monitor Mahopoc. Welles was slower than his Confederate counterpart, Stephen R. Mallory, to recognize the potential of ironclad vessels.



## New group works to further Lincoln legacy

Nov. 20, 2013

norwichbulletin.com

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### New group works to further Lincoln legacy

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By Adam Benson  
norwichbulletin.com/abenson

Posted Nov. 21, 2013 @ 8:18 pm

With a small crowd encircling it, City Historian Dale Plummer on Thursday rang the Norwich Freedom Bell seven times — each chime representing one of the Eastern Connecticut men who fell over the course of three days during the battle of Gettysburg.

Those soldiers, who fought in the 14th Connecticut Infantry during one of the Civil War's most notorious campaigns, are among the thousands from the area who rallied around the Union cause.

And now, a newly formed group of scholars is working to add to the city's Abraham Lincoln oeuvre by homing in on his ties to and personal relationships with people from the region.

"We have been working for about two years on celebrating the Emancipation Proclamation, and without a doubt, this is a continuation of that," Plummer said in introducing the Lincoln Forum of Eastern Connecticut, a group of scholars and enthusiasts. "We are creating a means to perpetuate the memory of Abraham Lincoln in this area, honoring him and also giving opportunity for people to study and learn more about him and his times."

Plummer said other ideas include erecting a statue of Lincoln somewhere downtown, and the installation of plaques at locations like the Wauregan Hotel — where Lincoln may have spent the night before he was president — and old City Hall at the intersection of Church and Court streets, where Lincoln spoke during an 1860 campaign tour.

In its first meeting at City Hall, Rhode Island Supreme Court Chief Justice and leading Lincoln authority Frank J. Williams said Norwich is a "Lincoln town" that is the perfect venue for such an intellectual pursuit.

"I want to be member No. 1," Williams said as he signed the forum's membership roster.

Plummer credited Mayor Peter Nystrom with helping to establish the group, which officials hope turns into a national draw for Lincoln enthusiasts.

"The more we can celebrate his presence here, the better off the city is as far as tourism goes," Nystrom said.

Thursday's event came two days after the 150th anniversary of the Gettysburg Address, delivered in November 1863 — four months after the battle, which changed the war's momentum.

The Rev. Michael Cagle, of Norwich, said he was stirred by Williams's remarks and the establishment of the forum itself.

"I think we take a lot of things for granted and we need to understand there was a lot shed for us, and I'm grateful for that," he said.

## BRIDGEPORT TABLET

Abraham Lincoln VISITED THIS CITY  
SATURDAY EVENING MARCH 10 1860 AND  
DELIVERED A POLITICAL ADDRESS BEFORE  
A LARGE AUDIENCE OF CITIZENS IN WASHINGTON  
HALL WHICH WAS THEN A PORTION OF THIS BUILDING

THIS TABLET IS PLACED HERE IN COMMEMORATION  
OF THAT EVENT BY THE CITY OF BRIDGEPORT 1911

on the wall of city Hall









